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JANE COUCH

This catalog documents the exhibition connected with the third residency of a nationally prominent artist in Winston-Salem. The Wake Forest University, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, North Carolina School of the Arts Artist-in-Residence program is sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. A three-year grant brings two artists a year for residencies and many more for short stays as

visiting artists to this community. SECCA's exhibition and catalog provide a general public exposure of the artist's work. The poster announces educational events open to the public at each of the host institutions. Each paper work of this program represents communication of ideas and images both visually and in the program they represent.

# JANE COUCH

Wake Forest University

Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

North Carolina School of the Arts

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

Sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation

On exhibit October 27-November 25, 1979  
Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art  
750 Marguerite Drive  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27106

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Pattern Painting has taken many by surprise, for we have survived almost an entire decade bereft of a major new art movement, a decade supposedly characterized by pluralism, extreme individualism, and subjectivity. That pluralism, however, did not seem to have room for Pattern Painting until just recently, when the thrust of this "secret" art movement could no longer be contained. Too many artists had evolved major statements within the stylistic parameters of Pattern Painting for it to be ignored. Many of the artists involved are women; other kinds of abstract painting seem less than vital; and the issues raised by Pattern Painting are fresh and pertinent. Some of the very characteristics of Pattern Painting that kept it "underground" now make it central to any discussion of contemporary art: the renewed relationship between fine art and the crafts, the use of referents in abstract art, the notion of decorativeness, and the question of beauty.

Jane Couch's contribution to and location within the general constellation of individual styles that constitute what we now know as Pattern Painting is unique. Certainly she uses repetition in a sensuous rather than in a minimal way. Her paintings actually look like patterns. They recall and refer to weaving and—as the artist herself has stated—to knitting, a process even more "non-art" than weaving. As in knitting (she herself knits), in her paintings she works in rows from left to right, from top to bottom. As in the utilitarian weaving she admires, she feels free to change colors as she runs out of them. The results, however, are firmly located in the tradition of all-over painting, out of Pollack.

Working relatively independently, but in tune with the major issues of contemporary abstract painting, Couch came upon solutions to art-making problems that overlap those of other Pattern Painting artists, particularly in terms of her sensuous articulation of a grid substructure.

Pattern Painting can already be divided into two clear subdivisions: the decorative and the conceptual. The decorativists (e.g. Miriam Schapiro, Jayce Kazloff, Kim MacCannel, et al) are more concerned with visual liveliness than with system or pattern per se. Whereas the conceptualists (e.g. Maria Yrisarry, Gloria Klein, Dee Shapiro, the Criss-Cross group, et al) emphasize system. Like Jerry Clapsaddle, Kendall Shaw, and perhaps Susan Michaud, Jane Couch is not overtly decorative, nor is she particularly mathematical or systemic in her pattern-making. Her kind of painting overlaps both wings of Pattern Painting, perhaps falling within a third yet unnamed subdivision. Her surfaces are systematically expressive, yet her patterns are more intuitive than systemic.

"Red/Green Painting" and "Kali G Mirchi" are typical of Couch's work. In fact, they are particularly fine examples. Angles and dots of paint play against the vertical and horizontal brushstrokes that describe the grid. Each loaded brushstroke articulates direction through texture, enlivens the surface, and firmly anchors the all-over pattern in a calaristic physicality. The paintings are rich but not ornate. Control and freedom are expressively balanced.

Jane Couch's paintings are Calar Field/Grid/ Pattern Paintings of particular density and impressive intensity. Their intensity is a product of touch times color times structure. In terms of the picture plane they are inordinately flat; the viewer is not drawn into an illusionary space, not even the typically shallow space of so much all-over painting. The figure/ground problem that has bothered so many painters in the past is solved, bluntly and dramatically. Yet the paintings are about space as much as they are about color, light, and texture. The space of the paintings moves laterally across the surface and can be described by time: the time it takes to read the dense surface, to focus first here then there then everywhere, and the time it takes to savor the

tender, cool, luxurious applications of paint. These are not easy paintings. The process of looking at them requires an empathy with the processes that went into their making: first the concept, then the rhythm of hours and days, the stroke by stroke decision-making, the patience, and then the joy of completion. The results are beautiful.

**John Perreoult, July 1979**

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1944. Educated at University of Oklahoma (BFA 1966) and University of Wisconsin at Madison (MA 1968). Lives in New York City.



I employ patterning in my work because I am drawn to repetition. Each painting begins with a pattern. The motifs are combinations of linear fragments, contours of triangles, circles and/or waves. When repeated in a pattern these motifs direct and move the eye rhythmically over and around the painting's surface. For example, the quarter circles in the "Red/Green Painting" cause a flip-flopping motion; sections of waves in "Kali and Mirchi" cause a flowing and swelling thrust.

The clear and bright colors used in the pattern are scattered unsystematically over the canvas to de-emphasize the regularity of the pattern. The colors for the ground are richer and more subtle, often derived from nature. In this show I was inspired by the variegated reds and greens of my begonia.

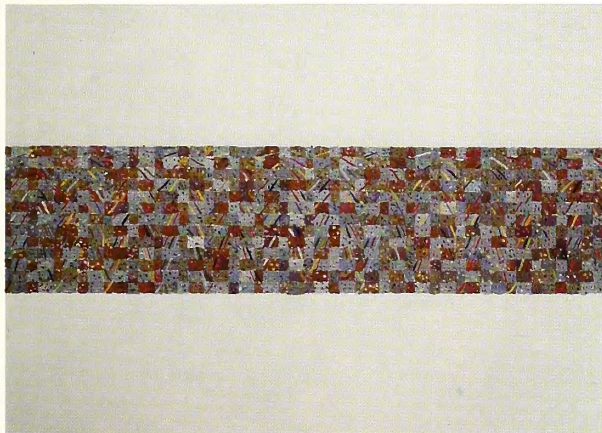
I try to create two different kinds of space in my paintings, the popping and sinking of the pattern contrasts with the shallow undulations of the ground. The color, space and texture all confuse the figure-ground relationship. The pattern and

ground are intermeshed with the ribboned brushwork. Strokes are made from left to right, row after row, with a brush overloaded with oil paint. In the latest painting, "Kali and Mirchi," the brushwork has become looser and more varied in width, more gestural. The process, similar to knitting and weaving is obsessive yet simple and direct.

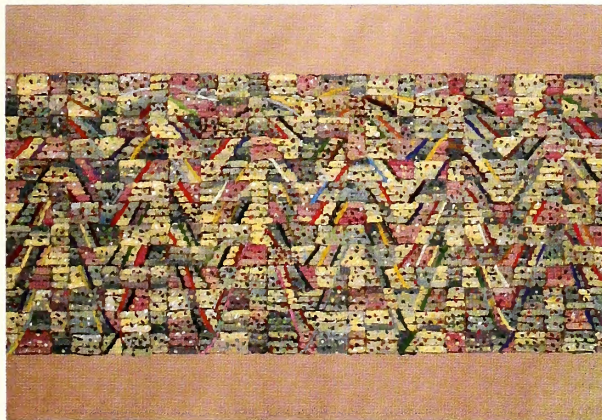
Hopefully, my paintings are complex and contemplative yet straightforward. Ideally, they speak for themselves.

Jane Cauch  
July 1979





**STUDY I**



**STUDY II**

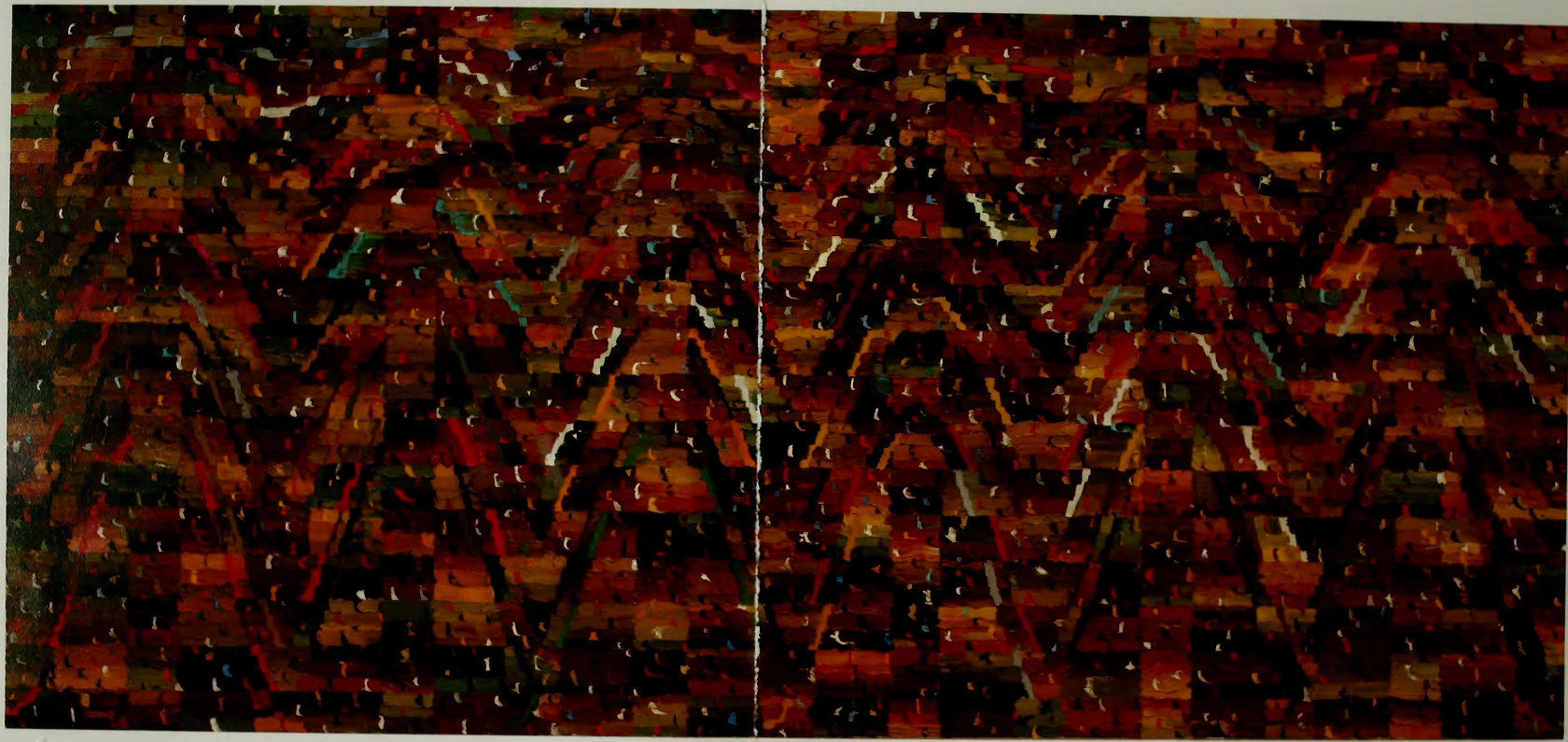
## **LIST OF EXHIBITIONS**

"Red/Green Painting," 1978,  
oil on canvas, 72 × 144"  
(182.9 × 365.8cm)

"Kali and Mirchi," 1979,  
oil on canvas, 72 × 155"  
(182.9 × 393.7cm)

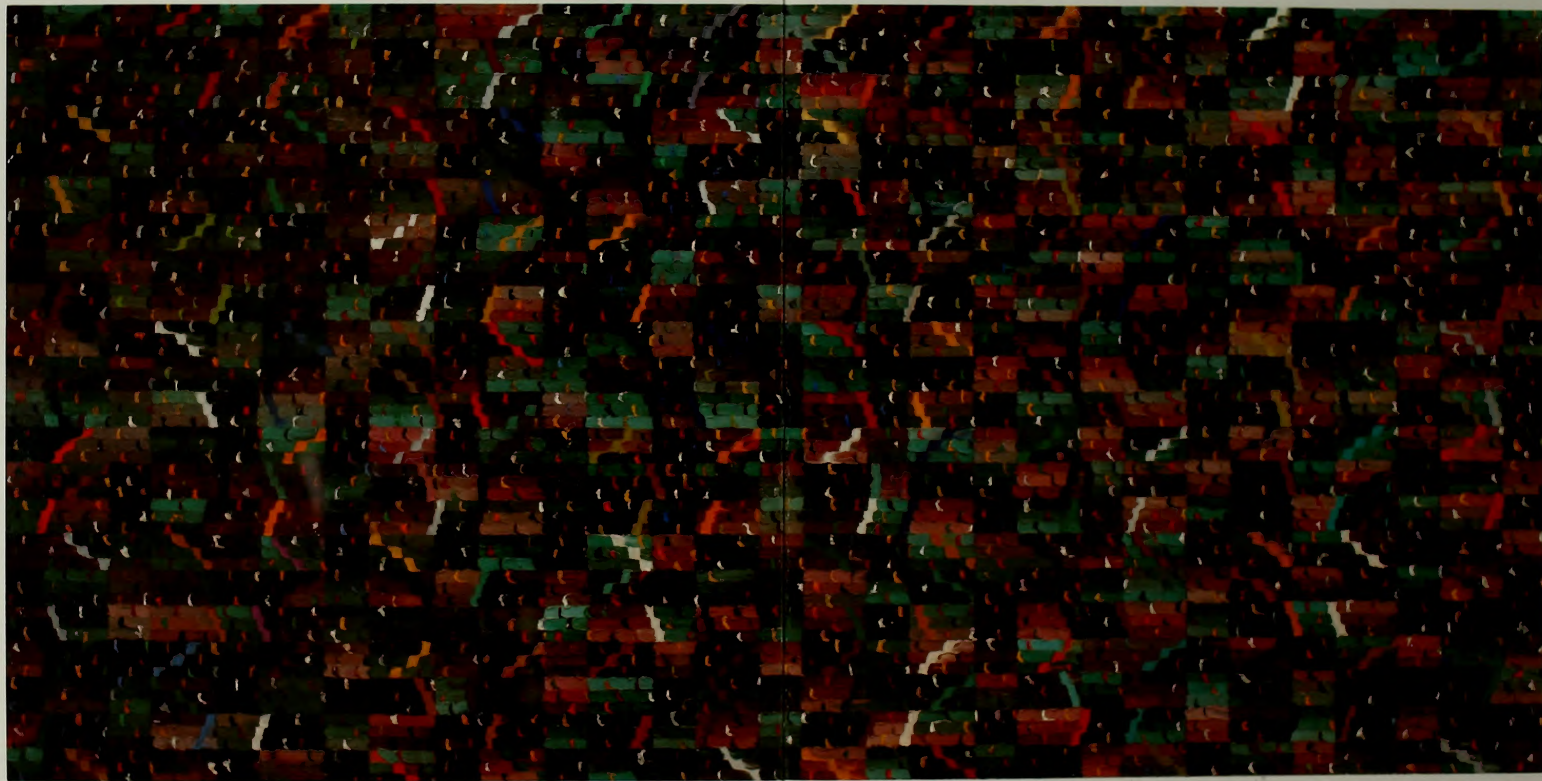
"Study for Kali and Mirchi I," 1979,  
watercolor on paper, 22 × 30"  
(55.9 × 76.2cm)

"Study for Kali and Mirchi II," 1979,  
watercolor on paper, 22 × 30"  
(55.9 × 76.2cm)



KALI AND MIRCHI





RED/GREEN PAINTING

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and Catalogues

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Communications, No. 6, March 1978,  
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## EXHIBITIONS

### Selected Group Exhibitions

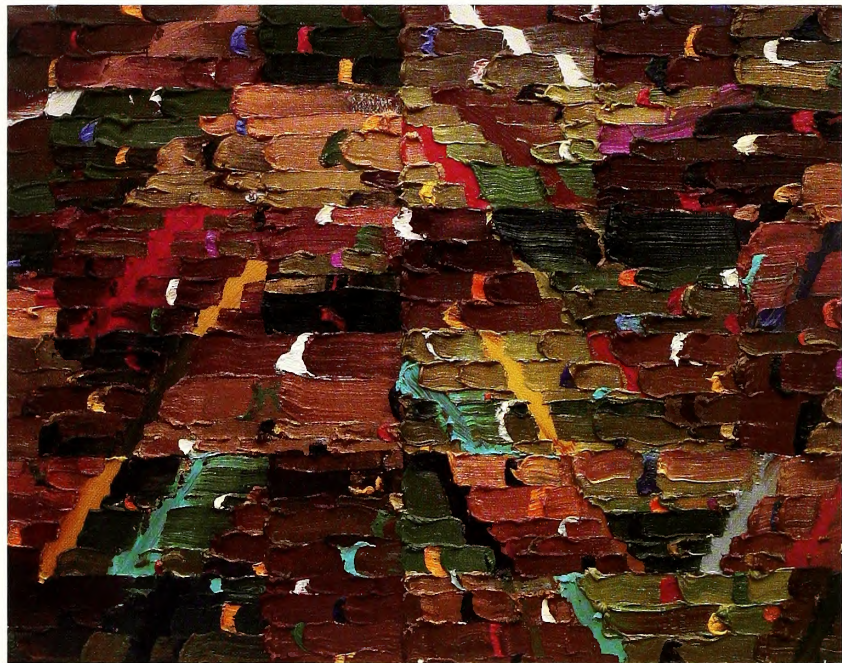
- 1966 "Mid-America Annual," William Rockhill Nelson Art Gallery and Arkins Museum of Fine Arts, Kansas City, Missouri  
 "Oklahoma Artists Annual," Philbrook Art Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma
- 1968 "Wiscansin Salan of Art," University of Wiscansin, Madison, Wiscansin  
 Annual Exhibition, Madison Art Center, Madison, Wiscansin
- 1974 "Women Choose Women," The New York Cultural Center, New York City  
 Invitational, A.I.R. Gallery, New York City

- 1976 O.K. Harris Gallery, New York City  
 Invitational, A.I.R. Gallery, New York City
- 1977 "Pattern Painting," P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York. Curated by John Perreault
- 1978 "Dissanance and Harmany," Clark Gallery, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, New York City.  
 Traveled to Westminster College Art Gallery, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania  
 "Pattern on Paper," Gladstone/Villani Gallery, New York City  
 "Pattern and Decoration," Sewall Art Gallery, Rice University, Houston, Texas
- 1979 "Persistant Pattern," Andre Zarre Gallery, New York City

### Selected One-Artist Exhibitions

- 1968 Master Thesis Exhibition, University of Wiscansin, Madison, Wiscansin
- 1977 College of Staten Island, Staten Island, New York





DETAIL OF "RED/GREEN PAINTING"

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